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THOMAS MACDONOUGH



An address, delivered before the
Vermont Historical Society,
October 27, 1904, in the
Hall of the House of
Representatives
Montpelier,
Vermont

By Hon. Charles H. Darling,
Assistant Secretary of the U. S. Navy



THOMAS MACDONOUGH.

AN ADDRESS, DELIVERED BEFORE THE VER-
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COMMODORE MACDONOUGH.

*Mr. President, Members of the Vermont Historical Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

Mr. Roosevelt in his *Naval War of 1812* says of Commodore Macdonough: "Down to the time of the Civil War, he was the greatest figure in our naval history." The life of a naval officer is consumed largely in preparation and waiting. If his opportunity never comes he passes through his several grades of promotion and is retired with little reward save the full consciousness of duties well done. If perchance fortune brings the supreme moment and his name is enrolled among the immortals his title to that fame often flows from capricious sources. It may follow from a career long and varied, it may depend upon a single conflict, or it may be traced to a conspicuous incident of battle. Paul Jones's retort, "We have just begun to fight," Lawrence's "Don't give up the ship," and Perry's message, "We have met the enemy and they are ours," are known around the world.

Macdonough lived in a romantic age of our naval history. He was the contemporary of Hull, Decatur, Lawrence, Porter, Stewart and others. The lives of many of these have been written, their records preserved, their memory duly honored; but who was this Macdonough, who, down to the time of the Civil War, was the greatest figure of them all? Lake Champlain is a small inland body of water and the general reader can hardly conceive that it was the scene of a great naval conflict, and for Macdon-

ough, except in connection with this battle, you may search the pages of history almost in vain.

His memory will always be closely associated with the history of this State, and it is but due to this Society that its records should bear a brief memorial of this remarkable man.

His family, as the name indicates, was of Scotch origin, but owing to the disturbed condition of that country, emigrated to Ireland. His grandfather, James Macdonough, came to America about 1730 and settled at New Castle, Delaware, at a place known as "The Trappe." He continued to reside there until his death in 1792. Thomas Macdonough, Sr., the father of the Commodore, was born there in 1747, and there he studied and practiced medicine until the opening of the Revolution. In March, 1776, he received a major's commission from the Continental Congress and joined the Colonial forces. His first engagement was in the battle of Long Island, in which he was wounded, and for gallant conduct in this action received the thanks of Washington. Subsequently he was in the battles of White Plains, Trenton and Princeton. In 1782 he was made colonel of the Seventh Regiment of the Delaware militia. In 1788 he was appointed a justice of the Court of Common Pleas and Orphan's Court and was reappointed in 1791, and again in 1793. He died in 1795 at the age of 48 years.

Thomas Macdonough, Jr., the Commodore, was born at the Trappe, on December 31, 1783.

The Trappe is hardly a village or even a hamlet. It consists of a cross-roads with an aggregate of four houses, and was dignified in 1844 by the Postoffice Department with the name of McDonough, in honor of the Commodore. In

this case the name is spelled McDonough, as it was sometimes used by the Commodore, but he generally spelled it Macdonough and this is now the accepted spelling.

Thomas Macdonough was one of four brothers, the oldest of whom served in the navy of the United States and lost a leg in the battle between the *Constellation* and *L'Insurgente* on February 18, 1799. Thomas's early life was passed on the farm at The Trappe, and he enjoyed the usual experiences of farmer and country boys. His early education must have been limited and perhaps neglected, for we find him serving an apprenticeship as a clerk in a store at the little cross-roads town of Middletown, in the State of Delaware, at the age of sixteen, when on the fifth day of February, 1800, he was appointed a midshipman in the navy by President John Adams.

Midshipman Macdonough was assigned to the United States ship *Ganges* at New Castle, Delaware, which set sail for the West Indies against the French who were then at war on the sea with the United States. His first voyage was an unhappy one. The *Ganges* cruised for a time in the West Indies and captured two Guineamen and a French privateer. The man-of-war at that time, unlike the warship of the present day, was not equipped with ice-plants, distilling apparatus and laundries, and the yellow fever broke out on board and many died. Young Macdonough caught the disease and was sent ashore at Havana. After remaining in a Spanish hospital for some time, he set sail in an American merchant vessel for the United States, but off the capes of Delaware the merchantman was captured by an English war vessel on account of having Spanish property on board. Macdonough was subsequently put on shore at Norfolk,

Virginia, destitute and almost without clothing, and in this dilemma made his way home, having been absent about one year, during which time his illness with yellow fever had been reported, and his family understood that he was dead.

On October 20, 1801, he joined the *Constitution* and sailed for the Mediterranean, returning in May, 1803. On the 24th of that month he was ordered to the ship *Philadelphia*, then fitting out, and again sailed for the Mediterranean. The Barbary States, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunis and Tripoli, were at that time sending out pirates to prey upon the commerce of the world, and were exacting tribute from every nation that sent its ships into the Mediterranean. England had looked with disfavor upon the growing commerce of the United States and was paying extra tribute to Tripoli to encourage the pirate trade and for the purpose of destroying American commerce. The United States having declared war against Tripoli, a squadron was maintained in the Mediterranean, first under Commodore Richard Dale, afterward under Commodores Richard V. Morris, Edward Preble and Charles Stewart. The *Philadelphia*, commanded by Captain Bainbridge, was sent to join this squadron.

The *Philadelphia* falling in with a pirate vessel from Morocco, the *Mirboka*, twenty-two guns, captured her without resistance and Macdonough was placed on board with a prize crew to take her to Gibraltar. The brig turned out to be the *Celia* of Boston which had been captured but a short time before and it was found that the captain carried an order from the governor of Tangier to capture Americans. Macdonough was left at Gibraltar with the *Mirboka* while the *Philadelphia* went for a cruise off Tripoli. Meanwhile Commodore Preble arrived at Gibraltar and arrangements

were made for the return of the *Mirboka* to the Emperor of Morocco, after which Macdonough joined the ship of Commodore Preble intending to continue as a passenger until they met the *Philadelphia*. (a) They fell in with a British frigate from which they learned that the *Philadelphia* had run upon a reef off Tripoli and been captured with all on board and towed into the harbor. The officers and men were kept in close confinement for over a year and a half and while thus a prisoner Capt. Bainbridge sent a communication to Commodore Preble advising him that he might enter the harbor in a small vessel and seize and destroy the *Philadelphia*.

Macdonough meanwhile had been transferred to the *Enterprise*, commanded by Lieut. Stephen Decatur. Upon hearing of the plan to destroy the *Philadelphia*, Decatur at once volunteered for the expedition. In November, 1804, the *Enterprise* had captured a small ketch known as the *Mastico*, on which were some Greeks, Turks and Tripolitans, among whom were officers and soldiers and a number of slaves. This ketch was selected for the expedition and renamed the *Intrepid*. Decatur was assigned to her command and Commodore Stewart directed that five midshipmen be taken from the *Constitution* and the balance of the officers and men from the *Enterprise*. On February 4, 1804, Decatur mustered the crew of the *Enterprise* and, after communicating to them the task he was to undertake, asked for volunteers. As has often been the case in the American navy in enterprises of great danger, officers and crew came

(a) In some histories, as in the Vermont Governor and Council, it is erroneously stated that Macdonough was on the *Philadelphia* when she was captured.

forward in a body. Decatur selected from the *Enterprise* his lieutenants, James Lawrence, Joseph Bainbridge and Jonathan Thorne, his surgeon, Lewis Heermann, and his favorite midshipman, Thomas Macdonough. Sixty of the crew were chosen and the party went on board the *Intrepid*. A pilot acquainted with the harbor of Tripoli, whose name, Decatur says, was Salvador Catalano, was sent from the *Constitution*, and Midshipman Anderson from the *Siren*, making in all seventy-one. Little time was allowed for preparation, and an hour after receiving notice, the little band set sail, accompanied by the *Siren* under Lieutenant Stewart which was to assist the ketch and in case of her destruction, which was considered probable, rescue her crew. Combustibles for destroying ships and two or three weeks' provisions were carried.

Tripoli was sighted February 7, and to avoid suspicion the *Intrepid* anchored after dark about a mile westward of the town. A strong gale was blowing and the pilot and most of the officers deeming the entrance unsafe in the face of the storm, the vessel soon weighed anchor and stood out to sea. When the gale subsided a successful attempt was made to enter the harbor. The *Siren's* character as a war vessel was concealed and she stood outside during the day, while the *Intrepid*, with a part of her crew below and the rest disguised as Maltese, maintained the appearance of being anxious to enter the harbor before nightfall. As darkness advanced the *Intrepid* was within three miles of the eastern entrance of the harbor, with the *Siren* three miles astern. The wind grew lighter and Decatur abandoned the plan of waiting for the *Siren* and gave orders to proceed, saying "the fewer the number the greater the honor." The plan of

seizing the *Philadelphia* was agreed upon in detail and the officers and men assigned to divisions for the purpose of carrying it out, the watchword "Philadelphia" was agreed upon and the ketch entered the harbor in silence. A light wind wafted the *Intrepid* up the bay, the young moon lighted up the water and made the concealment of the officers necessary. Now the first battery was passed and the *Intrepid* neared the *Philadelphia*. The enemy hailed the *Intrepid*, whose pilot, previously instructed, replied that they had lost their anchors in the gale and asked permission to run a rope to the frigate and ride by until anchors could be secured from the shore. The Tripolitans then asked what brig was in the offing, for notwithstanding their precautions, the *Siren* had been seen. The pilot with great tact replied that it was the *Transfer*, a former British man-of-war which had been purchased by the Tripolitans at Malta, the arrival of which was anxiously expected.

As the *Intrepid* was closing in on the frigate, the wind shifted and left her about twenty yards away.

This was a moment of great anxiety. The *Intrepid*, motionless and powerless except by movements which would betray her character, was directly under the guns of the *Philadelphia*. A boat from the *Intrepid* took a rope and made it fast to the chains of the *Philadelphia*, while a boat from the *Philadelphia* brought a rope from that ship and passed it to the *Intrepid*; the crew hauled on the lines, and the *Intrepid* was drawn gradually to the *Philadelphia*. When nearly in contact, the suspicions of the enemy were aroused and the cry of "Americanos" resounded through the ship. The *Intrepid* was ordered off, but in a moment more she closed with the *Philadelphia*, and Decatur gave the order to

board. There was no time for preparation on the part of the enemy and they scarcely made a show of resistance. Crowded together and trampling upon each other in disorder the Tripolitans were either cut down or driven overboard.

The American officers and men now separated in several parties and seized the respective parts of the ship as had previously been agreed upon, Midshipmen Macdonough and Laws seizing the berth-deck and forward store-room. Five minutes sufficed to clear the ship of the enemy, and Decatur was in full possession, destined to be her last, as his father had been her first, commander. In less than twenty minutes the combustibles had been distributed and set on fire, and the party was again on board the *Intrepid*. Those detailed to fire the ship were driven from below by the smoke, and soon the crackling of the flames gave indication that the destroying element had in turn assumed the mastery of the vessel.

The spectacle was weird and magnificent. The fire issued from the ports and mounted the hatchways and the whole ship was soon enveloped in flames, lighting up the city and surrounding shipping. The brilliant illumination, its reflection upon the water, the overhanging cloud of smoke, the lurid glare reflected over the quaint old city and the dark shadows which formed the background completed a picture of thrilling grandeur. As the loaded guns of the *Philadelphia* became heated they were discharged and mingled their roar with that of the flames above. Those manning the shore batteries were dazed at first but soon recovered and the fire of cannon became general. In the midst of this scene the crew of the *Intrepid* gave three cheers and commenced their retreat. The enemy's marksmanship was bad and the crew of the *Intrepid* were in more danger

from the guns of the burning *Philadelphia* than from those of the shore batteries, and although under the fire of a hundred guns for nearly half an hour she was struck by only a single shot passing through the top-gallant sail. The crew made use of sweeps and favored by a light breeze were soon out of danger. The scene was consummated by a terrific explosion which announced that the flames had reached the magazine of the *Philadelphia*. She sank close to the shore where she drifted after the melting of her chains. At the entrance of the harbor the ketch was met by the *Siren* and the two crews joined in general rejoicing at the success of the expedition.

This act has always been deemed one of the most brilliant and thrilling in the history of the navy, and down to the time of the Civil War it had no equal. Nelson was in command of the British fleet blockading Toulon at the time and when the news of the achievement reached him he pronounced it "the most bold and daring act of the age."

Congress gave a sword to Decatur and the other officers were suitably rewarded. Nearly all of these young officers became distinguished in our subsequent naval history.

Macdonough's life from the war with Tripoli to the autumn of 1812, when he took command of the boats on Lake Champlain, was that of a regular naval officer and sailor. During the administration of Jefferson the navy had been suffered to languish, and like many other officers he had been furloughed and joined the merchant service.

On his return to the United States from Tripoli in 1806 he was detached from the *Siren* and ordered to Middletown, Connecticut, under command of Captain Hull, and

later to the *Wasp*, in which he made a trip to England and France, returning by way of the Mediterranean. When the *Wasp* again reached the United States, in conjunction with other vessels she cruised along the coast from Boston to Charleston for the purpose of enforcing the embargo laws. In January, 1807, he received his appointment as a lieutenant in the navy, and was ordered to the *Wasp*, then at the Washington navy yard. On the last day of March, 1809, Macdonough was ordered to the frigate *Essex* and in September of the same year was given charge of the gunboats in Connecticut and Rhode Island. Returning to Washington under orders dated April, 1810, he was granted a furlough of several months that he might make a voyage to the East Indies, but in May he was ordered to the *Chesapeake* for a period of twelve days, after which he resumed his furlough. Another furlough was granted him in October, 1811; and July 17th of the following year he was ordered to the *Constitution*, leaving that ship a month later to take command of the vessels at Portland, Maine, and going from that point to Lake Champlain.

In the fall of 1811 there occurred an incident between the Secretary of the Navy, Paul Hamilton, and Macdonough which led the latter to suggest the presentation of his resignation. The matter was satisfactorily arranged, however, and the request of Macdonough for another furlough, which was the cause of the difference, was granted by the Department. In reply to Macdonough's letter stating that he would feel compelled to resign unless his request was favored, he was informed that in consideration of his good standing his request would be granted.

Although this was a period of peace during which Macdonough was occupied with the ordinary duties of a sailor's life, it was not without adventure. One of these occurred soon after he was furloughed in May, 1810, and ordered to make a voyage in the merchant service. As captain of the merchant brig *Gulliver* he sailed from New York for Liverpool, and later to Calcutta. On the evening of the day before the brig was to leave Liverpool, Macdonough, who had been on shore, was returning to the wharf to proceed to his ship, when he was accosted by a man who asked if he belonged to any ship in the harbor. On his replying that he belonged to the brig *Gulliver*, he was seized by several men and taken to a British frigate, enrolled on the purser's list, given a hammock and ordered forward, no attention being paid to his assertion that he was not only an American but an officer in the navy. Lying in his hammock he made plans for his escape, and when the corporal of the guard had entered and gone to sleep in an adjoining hammock, Macdonough dressed himself in the corporal's uniform and walked boldly on deck. Saluting the officer of the deck he asked permission to examine the second cutter alongside, in which he said he suspected there was rum concealed. Not being recognized, permission was readily given, but as Macdonough passed the forward hatch he saw the real corporal's head coming up. With a blow of his fist he sent the corporal to the bottom of the ladder and quickly swung himself into the cutter and severed the rope. The strong current soon carried the boat off and in spite of pursuit Macdonough reached the shore and joined his own ship. At this time he is reported to have said: "If I live, I'll make England remember the day she impressed an American sailor."

It is related that while the squadron was at Syracuse the officers and men were often set upon by ruffians and that on one occasion Decatur and Midshipman Macdonough, while passing down one of the streets of the city at night, were attacked by three men. Drawing their swords they defended themselves so successfully that the men were driven off, and Macdonough pursued one of them to the top of a house, from which the man jumped to the ground and perished from the fall.

In 1806, while first lieutenant of the *Siren*, then lying in the harbor at Gibraltar, Macdonough, in the absence of the captain, who was on shore, rescued an American seaman who had been impressed by the crew of a British frigate from one of the merchantmen in the harbor. Hearing of the incident Macdonough ordered his gig to be manned and armed and pursued the boat of the press gang, rescuing the seaman from alongside the British frigate. The captain of the frigate went on board the *Siren* in a great passion and demanded of Macdonough how he dared take a man from one of his majesty's boats. He then threatened to bring his frigate alongside the *Siren* and retake the man by force. Macdonough replied that he supposed the frigate could sink the *Siren*, but so long as she could swim he would keep the man. The British made a demonstration as though they would board the *Siren*, but the prompt preparations by Macdonough induced them to give up the attempt. Macdonough was at this time about twenty-three years of age.

On September 12, 1812, Macdonough, then stationed at Portland, Maine, was ordered to take command of the vessels on Lake Champlain. He made the journey across the

country on horseback, carrying only a bundle and a valise, and attended only by a country boy who returned with his horse. He reached Burlington at the end of four days' journey and took command of the fleet, which consisted of two sloops, the *Eagle* and *Growler*, and two or three small galleys. There were two other sloops on the lake known as the *President* and *Montgomery*, which have sometimes been included in Macdonough's fleet. They were, however, in no naval engagement and are not mentioned in any of Macdonough's correspondence. After he first arrived at the lake they seem to have dropped out of all account. From a study of the records of the War and Navy Departments the history of the two vessels may be explained as follows: Prior to Macdonough's assuming command of the fleet all government vessels on the lake were under command of General Dearborn of the army. At that time the sloop *President* was included in the fleet. Under date of September 12, 1812, the Secretary of War wrote to General Dearborn that a naval officer by the name of Macdonough had been ordered to take command of the flotilla on the lake, and October 16th following, General Dearborn replied maintaining that there should be but one commander on the lake and that he should be under the War Department. He protested against a naval officer being placed in command and suggested an appeal to the President. He further wrote, however, that he had so far complied with the order of the Secretary of War as to turn over two of the vessels, but would not turn over the other unless Macdonough and the whole fleet were placed under his command. It is probable that when General Dearborn turned over the *Eagle* and the *Growler* he did not turn over the third vessel, which he

stated he would not do unless compelled to. The third vessel, which is referred to as the *President*, probably continued in the service of the War Department. During the next year, 1813, the War Department purchased the *Montgomery*, which with the *President*, was doubtless used and maintained by the army for conveying troops and supplies up and down the lake. Niles's Register, the best authority on naval matters of the time, while including the *President* and *Montgomery* in Macdonough's fleet, states that the *President* was purchased by the War Department in 1812 and the *Montgomery* in 1813; that they were not in the naval engagement on the lake, and were sold in 1815. The War Department is not mentioned by Niles as having any connection with any other vessel in Macdonough's fleet, and while Macdonough commanded the entire naval flotilla upon the lake, these two vessels, the *President* and *Montgomery*, were retained and used exclusively in the service of the War Department and were at no time any part of Macdonough's fleet.

Upon his arrival at the lake Macdonough commenced at once to collect men, ammunition and supplies, but during the fall of 1812 and summer of 1813 little was accomplished. The British continued to control the north end of the lake and during the summer of 1813 Macdonough sent the *Eagle* and *Growler* under Lieutenant Sidney Smith to drive the enemy down the lake. The British retired and Smith, following rashly, struck a rapid current in shoal water, grounded and lost both vessels to the enemy. Thus at the close of 1813 the British were virtually in command of the lake.

The fall of Napoleon Bonaparte in April, 1814, had relieved England from her struggle with France and left her

free to pursue the war in America. She organized a large force in Canada for the purpose of driving the Americans from the lake and surrounding country, with the intention of making connections with New York by way of the Hudson River, with a view to cutting off New England from the other States. The forces on land were commanded by Sir George Prevost and on the lake by Captain George Downie.

Macdonough had purchased a sloop from the lake service known as the *Rising Sun* and rechristened her the *Preble*. He also purchased a steamboat, probably the one known as the *Vermont*, and rechristened her the *Ticonderoga*. This is the first case in which steam power was applied to a naval vessel, but as her engines were constantly breaking down, Macdonough soon determined to take out the machinery and refit her as a schooner.

Hearing of the intended invasion, Macdonough repaired to Vergennes, about seven miles up the Otter Creek, to overhaul the *Ticonderoga* and *Preble* and to build a ship and some large galleys. Vergennes for those times was something of a centre of industry. There were several saw-mills, a grist-mill, a slitting-mill, a shop for making nails, a steel foundry and several forges. One foundry alone had nine fires. Iron ore was mined at Monkton, a town near by, and large tracts of timber land were easily available. At one of the foundries one hundred and twenty-seven tons of cannon shot were cast for the fleet.

The winter was well advanced before any considerable work was done on the vessels, but early in the spring the woods and valleys around rang with the sound of axe and hammer. In a letter written by Daniel Wright in 1835 he

states that in March, 1814, he was called into the service of the United States to aid in forwarding timber to the shipyard at Vergennes to build three large vessels for the lake and several gunboats. Fifty men were sent to his house to be boarded while they were cutting timber. He labored with them with a team of his own. The order to procure and forward the timber was executed in five and a half days by one hundred and ten men.

The three vessels referred to in this letter must have been the *Ticonderoga*, the *Preble* and *Saratoga*. The trees out of which the *Saratoga* was built were standing in the forest forty days previous to her being launched.

May 14, 1813, before Macdonough had got his fleet out of the creek, the British sent a sloop and sixteen galleys to destroy it as it lay at anchor. They attacked the battery at the mouth of the creek, but Macdonough, with what vessels he had afloat, dropped down the creek and put the enemy to flight. Local historians maintain that this engagement is entitled to more serious consideration than has been given it in history.

In July following Macdonough learned that the British had laid the keel of a new frigate at the lower end of the lake. He again commenced preparations for building and the country around Vergennes was again enlivened by his work upon a new brig. The keel was laid on July 29th, and she was launched on August 16th, nineteen days after the laying of the keel, including Sundays. This brig was also named the *Eagle* and was substantially of the same size as Perry's flagships *Lawrence* and *Niagara* on Lake Erie, while the *Saratoga* was much superior to Perry's largest vessel. The time in which Perry built his ships has often been men-

tioned in praise and wonder, but Macdonough's ships were not only of larger tonnage but were built and completed in a shorter time.

When Macdonough had completed his brig he crossed the lake and took up his position in Plattsburgh Bay. His fleet then consisted of the *Eagle*, the *Ticonderoga*, and the *Preble*, with four small and six large galleys. He reasoned that the British would not venture to pass up the lake and leave his fleet to harass them in the rear, and determined to anchor his vessels, await the attack of the British and fight his ships at anchor. Captain Downie's fleet slightly surpassed that of Macdonough in number, tonnage, battery and men.

Spear, in "The History of Our Navy," says "the two leading British ships had as great a weight of metal in long guns as the whole Yankee squadron, gunboats and all."

Cooper, in his Naval History, says: "The force of the enemy was materially greater than that of the Americans."

Mr. Roosevelt, in his Naval War of 1812, has made a careful and detailed analysis of the strength of the respective forces, as follows:

MACDONOUGH'S FORCE.

Name.	Tons.	Crew	Broadside. lbs.
Saratoga	734	240	414
Eagle	500	150	264
Ticonderoga	350	112	180
Preble	80	30	36
Six gun-boats	420	246	252
Four gun-boats	160	104	48

DOWNIE'S SQUADRON.

Confiance	1200	325	480
Linnet	350	125	96
Chubb	112	50	96
Finch	110	50	84
Five gun-boats	350	205	254
Seven gun-boats	280	182	182

Macdonough's Force.—Fourteen vessels of 2,244 tons and 882 men, with 86 guns throwing a broadside of 1,194 pounds of shot, 480 pounds from long and 714 from short guns.

Downie's Squadron.—Sixteen vessels of about 2,402 tons, with 937 men, and a total of 92 guns, throwing a broadside of 1,192 pounds, 660 from long and 532 from short pieces.

To understand fully the consummate skill with which Macdonough placed his fleet it is necessary to explain that the lake is a narrow body of water, running, unlike most of the waters of the United States, from the south toward the north. Such is its shape and that of the mountains about it that the wind commonly blows either directly up or down the lake.

Much credit has always been given to the manner in which Macdonough anchored his ships. The histories of the battle invariably speak of his having anchored with "springs," but never explain what is meant by anchoring with a spring. The purpose of anchoring with a spring is to enable the ship to be turned while lying at anchor, but as this is purely a nautical term it is necessary to explain at some length just how this is accomplished. If a string be attached to a float in a running stream the float will bring up with the end to which the string is attached pointing up

stream. In a like manner if an anchor is thrown out from the prow or stern of a ship the ship will bring up with the stem or prow to which the anchor is attached facing up the current, or into the wind if the sails are set and that is the controlling force. If after the ship is so brought up a second anchor is dropped from the stern or other end of the ship, and the first anchor is raised, the ship will immediately turn about and the stern, to which the second anchor is attached, will face up the current or into the wind as the case may be. If a line is carried from a ship swinging at anchor to some fixed object on shore or at some distance from the side of the ship and the line pulled in, the ship will swing around or be drawn toward the object to which the line is attached. To accomplish this small anchors, known as "kedge" anchors are frequently carried out in boats from the ship and dropped at some distance. Lines may also be carried from the main anchor chains to different parts of the ship for the same purpose. This is what is meant by anchoring with a spring.

Macdonough availed himself of all these expedients. He dropped an anchor from the bow, another from the stern; he attached lines to the anchor chains, and he also carried out kedge anchors to either side of the ship and in this manner by raising or letting go on one anchor and pulling in on different lines he was able to turn and manoeuver his ships.

The American fleet was formed in a double line of battle across the entrance to Plattsburg Bay from Cumberland Head toward Crab Island. In the outer line were the *Eagle*, *Saratoga*, *Ticonderoga* and *Preble*, in order named from Cumberland Head southward, while the gunboats made up

the inner line. The British line from the north southward was as follows: *Chubb*, *Linnet*, *Confiance* and *Finch*, with the gunboats between the two latter vessels and extending the line. By this formation Macdonough prevented Downie's ships from passing around his line of battle on account of shoal water at the ends of the line and in addition the British commander was unable to draw out his full line unless he did so outside the bay.

At a little past eight on a beautiful Sunday morning, September 11, 1814, the British hove around Cumberland Head. Macdonough knelt in prayer on the deck and awaited the enemy. When the *Confiance* had come into full view Downie hove to for the purpose of allowing his gunboats to come up. He then ordered them to attack the southern end of the American line, and while the *Chubb* and *Linnet* attempted to turn the northerly end of the line, he proceeded to attack the *Saratoga* and *Ticonderoga* with his own ship and the *Finch*. Macdonough waited until the *Confiance* came within range and then fired the first gun himself. The twenty-four pound shot raked the deck of the *Confiance*, killing and wounding several men and carrying away her wheel. This was the signal for general firing on the part of the Americans. The *Confiance* held her fire until within a short distance of the *Saratoga* and then discharged a broadside with terrific effect, killing and wounding nearly forty men. The battle thereupon became general and was waged with great fierceness all along the line. Macdonough himself was twice knocked down, once by a falling spar and again by being struck with the head of one of his men which had been severed by a cannon ball and hurled against him with great force. The *Finch*, being disabled by the *Ticon-*

deroga early in the engagement, drifted down toward Crab Island, where she was fired upon by a shore battery manned by invalids and surrendered. The *Eagle* had her springs shot away and drifted down to the west side of the line, which enabled the *Linnet* to turn the American line at the north. Nearly all the guns of the *Saratoga* and many on the *Confiance* were rendered useless. In this situation the forethought of Macdonough in setting springs enabled him to swing his ship around and bring his fresh port battery into action. The British commander tried the same manoeuver, but failed to accomplish his purpose. Macdonough's expedient turned the battle in his favor and at the end of two hours and thirty minutes the British struck, and Macdonough had enrolled his name among the greatest of American naval heroes.

While the naval engagement was going on General Prevost engaged the forces on shore, but learning of the disaster to the British fleet, withdrew in disorder, leaving the American forces in undisputed possession of the northern border. Macdonough's victory was the beginning of the end of the war and contributed much in securing favorable negotiations for peace.

Much has been said about the manner in which the American land forces, two thousand in number, repulsed the British army, fourteen thousand in number, at Plattsburg. But it must be remembered that the British expedition, as well land as naval, had for its object the seizure of Crown Point and the opening of communication from the upper end of the lake to the Hudson River. It therefore became necessary that the British should gain the mastery of the lake in order to make the expedition successful, either with re-

spect to land or naval forces. While the American forces on land were holding their position against the British during the engagement on the water, it is hardly to be supposed that the two thousand militia would have long endured against the fourteen thousand British regulars, had the naval engagement terminated in favor of the British. All honor is, therefore, due to Macdonough in the engagement, for the victory upon land as well as water. Nor can too much be said in praise of his plan of battle or its execution.

His victory was due to three distinguishing causes. First, Cumberland Head juts out from the New York shore toward the east and south, forming Plattsburg Bay. Across this bay from Cumberland Head toward Crab Island Macdonough placed his fleet, knowing that the British would not dare pass up the lake leaving him to harass their rear. He thereby compelled the British to tack around Cumberland Head and attack his fleet, bows on, thus exposing themselves to a raking fire from Macdonough's broadsides. By so doing Macdonough accomplished what rarely occurs in a sea fight, namely, chose his own position and forced the enemy to attack him to the enemy's greatest disadvantage. In short he forced the enemy to attack him where he chose and as he chose.

The second cause was his superior seamanship in the manner in which he set his springs, as before described, and the ability with which he afterward manoeuvred or winded his ships.

The third cause of victory lay in the superiority of his marksmanship and the valor and persistence with which his ships were fought. The ships of either side were not inferior in size or armament to the majority of the deep sea

men-of-wars-men of the time. Macdonough's flag ship and the British flagship, the *Confiance*, were each somewhat smaller than the *Constitution*, but they were larger than the *Peacock*, *Wasp*, *Hornet*, *Intrepid*, *Boxer*, *Enterprise*, *Bonne Homme Richard* and all other famous ships of the navy up to that time, save the *Constitution*, the *President* and their class. Both the *Saratoga* and the *Ticonderoga* were larger than the flagships *Niagara* and *Lawrence* of Perry's fleet, or any of the other ships on either side of the Lake Erie battle. Each of the fleets on Lake Champlain were somewhat larger than either of the fleets on Lake Erie. Perry's gallant conduct in battle, the transfer of his flag from the *Lawrence* to the *Niagara* after the former was disabled, his famous dispatch to General Harrison, "We have met the enemy and they are ours," have made his name famous. But Perry's force exceeded the British in ships, men, tonnage and metal, while the British force on Lake Champlain exceeded Macdonough's in the same particulars. In fact Macdonough alone among all the American commanders is distinguished in having commanded the only smaller fleet that ever defeated a larger one.

This comparison with the battle of Lake Erie is not made for the purpose of detracting anything from the glory of that battle, for which all honor is due, but because the battles of Lake Champlain and Lake Erie perhaps more closely resemble each other than any others in American history. Great as was the battle of Lake Erie, the battle of Lake Champlain was greater. Nor does history furnish many examples of greater severity, for the American loss numbered 104 killed and 116 wounded, and the British 168 killed and 220 wounded, Captain Downie of the British fleet

being among the killed. When the battle ceased hardly a mast was standing in either fleet and an old sailor who had been with Nelson at Trafalgar declared that that was "but a flea bite to this."

Mr. Roosevelt in his *Naval War of 1812* says:

"Captain Perry's name is more widely known than that of any other commander. Every school boy reads about him, if of no other sea captain; yet he certainly stands on a lower grade than Macdonough." And again, "But it will always be a source of surprise that the American public should have so glorified Perry's victory over an inferior force, and have paid comparatively little attention to Macdonough's victory which was really won against decided odds in ships, men and metal."

Macdonough was commissioned a master-commandant on July 24, 1813, and on November 30, 1814, he was appointed a captain in the navy, to rank from September 11, 1814. He was always spoken of as "Commodore" because he commanded a fleet.

The Legislature of Vermont passed a resolution of thanks for his "unrivalled bravery and important service in the conquest of a British squadron of a superior force on the 11th of September, 1814, which protected the soil of free-men, gained the applause of millions, and merited universal respect and admiration." Vermont also purchased and conveyed to him a tract of land lying on Cumberland Head, overlooking the scene of the battle. New York State by letters patent granted him one thousand acres of land in the town of Sterling, county of Cayuga. The State of Delaware gave him an elegant sword and a service of plate, while Congress caused a gold medal to be struck and pre-

sented to him, emblematic of the action between the two squadrons.

On December 12, 1812, Macdonough married Lucy Ann, daughter of Nathaniel Shaler, of Middletown, Conn., by whom he had nine children, and thereafter his home was at Middletown.

Several months following the victory of Lake Champlain were spent by Macdonough in making disposition of the ships and stores left on the lake, and it is not until May 23, 1815, that orders are found assigning him to other duty. On this date he was directed to proceed to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to take command of the navy yard and have charge of the equipment of the *Washington*, the latter duty to terminate upon the arrival of Commodore Chauncey. In November, 1816, he was again ordered to Lake Champlain to serve as one of a board of commissioners to be formed at Plattsburgh, New York, to determine the proper sites for fortifications contemplated on the lake. In April, 1818, he was ordered from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Boston to take command and have charge of the preparation for sea of the U. S. S. frigate *Guerriere*, which had been selected to convey to St. Petersburg our new minister plenipotentiary to Russia, Hon. G. W. Campbell. This command was evidently looked upon as of considerable importance, for Commodore Macdonough was directed to "give every effect which shall add to the dignity of the mission to one of the greatest powers in Europe."

After Macdonough left Russia to join the Mediterranean squadron the most unpleasant incident in his naval service occurred. A marine named Robert Sloane assaulted

one of the officers with a bayonet, and under the law that obtained then as now, the commander-in-chief of a fleet on a foreign station was authorized to convene a court martial for his trial, pursuant to which Commodore Stewart convened a court, of which Macdonough was president, for such trial on board the *Guerriere*. When the evidence had been submitted and the court had found the man guilty it adjourned to meet at a tavern in the city of Naples. The adjournment to that place was made for the purpose of making and correcting the record on account of the illness of the judge advocate of the court, who was stopping at the tavern. The court met pursuant to such adjournment, and after correcting the record and signing it, forwarded it to the commander-in-chief, who, under the law, was the reviewing authority. Commodore Stewart in reviewing the case decided that the adjournment from the ship to the city of Naples, in foreign territory, was out of the jurisdiction of the court and that the proceedings were, therefore, null and void. He discharged the accused marine and notified the court of his decision. The court thereupon reconvened on board the *Guerriere*, and acting under the advice of the judge advocate, prepared a document of considerable length in turn reviewing the decision of Commodore Stewart. In their review they passed such strictures upon Commodore Stewart's judgment as to constitute a breach of military discipline. He reported it to Washington, recommending that the members of the court be sent to the United States under arrest to be further dealt with as the authorities at Washington deemed best. The Secretary of the Navy, by direction of the President, approved the recommendation of Commodore Stewart, and Macdonough and the other mem-

bers of the court were returned to the United States on board the U. S. S. *Erie*. After reaching home Macdonough took counsel with respect to the propriety of his acts, and becoming convinced that he had been in error, so wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, who replied that his course was such as might be expected from an honorable and high-minded man, and that under this view of the subject, the President had authorized him to restore Macdonough to the command of the *Guerriere*, and the incident was closed.

While this incident will always be regretted, the gravity of it was no more serious than a misunderstanding of his rights with respect to the law; but the dignity and reserve with which he bore himself throughout the whole unfortunate affair, together with the magnanimity with which he acknowledged the error when discovered, must always accentuate rather than detract from the greatness of the man.

On March 11, 1820, Macdonough was ordered to the New York navy yard to have charge of the frigate "74," and subsequently was in command of the *Washington* at that yard and also of the *Ohio*, neither of which were at sea. He spent a portion of his time with his family at Middletown, Connecticut, until March 22, 1824, when upon his own application he was given command of the *Constitution* and sailed for the Mediterranean from New York, October 29, 1824.

Commodore Macdonough's health declined during his cruise in the Mediterranean and he was relieved of the command of the *Constitution* on October 14th, 1825. Accompanied by his physician he started for the United States in the brig *Edwin*, but died at sea November 10, 1825. The remains were landed at Philadelphia November 25th, and taken

to New York, where the funeral was one of the events of the time. The city passed resolutions of respect and citizens generally participated in the honors. The remains were brought from the navy yard on a barge under a canopy of the American flag, escorted by eight boats filled with officers and marines and were taken to the city hall. The funeral service was read at St. Paul's Church by Chaplain Cave Jones. The bearers were officers of the navy. Flags in the city and harbor were at half mast during the day, bells were tolled and minute guns fired. After the service the remains were escorted to the steamboat *Commerce*, on which they were conveyed to Middletown, Connecticut, for burial. The procession included a detachment of horse artillery, a battalion of infantry, a detachment of U. S. marines, officers of the army and navy, the mayor and members of the city government, the Society of Cincinnati, of which the deceased was an honorary member, senators and members of the U. S. House of Representatives, judges of the courts of the United States and New York State, senators and members of the State Assembly, ministers and consuls and officers holding commissions from foreign courts and officials and citizens of New York.

On the arrival of the remains at Middletown they were taken to his late home. The funeral was then held from the Presbyterian Church, attended by judges of the Supreme Court, the military, the officers of the army and navy, the Masons and a large body of citizens. The cadets of the Military Academy conducted by Captain Alden Partridge, former surveyor general of Vermont, acted as a military escort for the remains and fired three volleys over the grave. Minute guns were also fired from the academy grounds at

the time of the funeral and flags in the city and harbor were floated at half mast.

The family monument is of plain white marble and bears this epitaph:

"Sacred to the memory of Com. Thomas Macdonough of the U. S. Navy. He was born in the State of Delaware, December, 1783, & died at sea of pulmonary consumption, while on his return from the command of the American squadron in the Mediterranean, on the 10th November, 1825. He was distinguished in the world as the hero of Lake Champlain, in the Church of Christ as a faithful, zealous, consistent Christian, in the community where he resided when absent from professional duty as an amiable, upright and valuable citizen."

And so at a little less than forty-two years of age, a brilliant career was closed.

Macdonough was a tall, spare, dignified man. His complexion, eyes and hair were light. His face was full and regular. His countenance frank, open, refined and intellectual. His mouth and chin were not large, but indicated decision of character. His nose may be described as tending toward the Roman type, his eyes bright and penetrating, but kindly, his forehead high, his hair abundant. He may well have been called a handsome man.

Until broken by disease he was straight, vigorous and athletic. He was of a slightly nervous temperament, but had schooled himself to a rigorous self-control. In youth he is said to have been sufficiently fond of pranks, but early care and responsibility subdued his spirit, and while yet young he leaned rather toward seriousness. He was an all-around sailor of the old man-of-wars-man type, when self

reliance and resourcefulness in the hour of trial gained the victory. He was quick to discern the critical moment and act with decision.

Men are sometimes deemed brilliant because their opinions are quickly formed, but conjecture is not to be confounded with logical reasoning, nor impressions with deliberate judgment. The correctness of the conclusion is the test of the mental operation, and in this Macdonough was unerring. He commanded rather by his example and the force of his character than by virtue of his rank.

In the battle which made his name famous he fired the first gun with his own hand and was twice knocked senseless on the deck, and when the report ran through the ship that the Commodore was dead, the crew paused dismayed in the midst of the battle. No higher testimonial of his bravery can be written than that in the most thrilling events of his time he walked side by side with the gallant Decatur. Although the ravages of disease had wasted his body to sixty pounds, *by* his fortitude he retained command of the *Constitution* to within twenty-seven days of his death.

The war of 1812 was fought by the American sailor for the maintenance of free ships and sailors' rights. The country's cause was the sailors' cause. It was a struggle to redress wrongs which had been seared upon the memory. Through it all Macdonough remained calm and self-possessed, spoke no hasty word, did no unwise act. Upright and independent himself, he abhorred oppression; loyal to his country and fearless in battle, he was charitable to the vanquished and pitied the suffering.

While Captain Pring of the British sloop *Linnet* was a prisoner he testified: "I have much satisfaction in making

you acquainted with the humane treatment the wounded have received from Commodore Macdonough. His generous and polite attention to myself, the officers and men, will ever be gratefully remembered."

Macdonough was loved by his officers and men, popular with those who knew him, respected by all. He enjoyed society and was free and courteous with his friends.

To his brother's widow left in narrow circumstances he tendered pecuniary aid, saying that his religion made him the widow's friend.

His character was devout and religious. He spoke of his escape from the fate of his companions on the *Philadelphia* as "providential." On the morning of the great battle he prayed with his men as he saw the enemy approaching and remarked that, "they are superior to us in force, but, by the blessing of God, we can beat them." When asked how he escaped when so many around him fell, he replied, pointing to heaven: "There is a power above which determines the fate of men." In reporting the battle to the Navy Department he declared that, "The Almighty has been pleased to grant us a signal victory."

He added distinction to his service, glory to his country, lustre to his flag and nobility to mankind.



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